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ABSTRACT

In 1976 and 1981, surveys were conducted to determine the curricular role of geography in the New York State Community College System. The questionnaire solicited information on the geography courses offered; frequency with which they were offered; new courses planned; faculty degrees; responsiveness of geographical associations and community college organizations to professional needs; possibility and desirability of expanding the geography curriculum; need for faculty support from geography organizations; interaction with four-year college geography faculty; and interest in a New York State geography society. Study findings, based on a 100% response rate from the 38 community colleges in New York, include the following: (1) the most commonly offered geography course was Introduction to Cultural Geography, offered by eight colleges; (2) the total number of geography courses taught increased from 49 in 1976 to 62 in 1981; (3) among the 27 faculty members teaching geography in 1981, only 16 held degrees in geography; (4) 22 of these instructors were employed full-time, and five were employed part-time; (5) 72% of the responding colleges felt that more geography courses could be taught, 66% felt more should be taught; and (6) the needs of faculty were not felt to be met by four-year college departments, professional associations, or community college groups. The study report details findings and compares 1976 and 1981 results. The questionnaire is appended. (AYC)

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GEOGRAPHY IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CURRICULUM: THE CASE OF NEW YORK STATE

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SUMMARY OF THE PAPER

TITLE: Geography in the Community College Curriculum: The Case of New York State.

ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the status of Geography in the curriculum of the community colleges in New York State. An initial survey was undertaken in 1976 and a follow-up questionnaire was distributed in 1981. Analyses of the questionnaire returns indicated the types of Geography courses being taught in the two year colleges, the academic training of the "Geography instructors" and the plans for future course offerings. In addition, the changing status of Geography at these institutions during the past half decade was examined.

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GEOGRAPHY IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CURRICULUM: THE CASE OF NEW YORK STATE

Introduction.

In the State of New York there are 38 community colleges; 30 sponsored jointly by the State University and the individual counties and 8 by the City University of New York and the New York City Board of Education. These educational institutions enroll some 280,000 students of which about 30 percent attend the colleges in New York City. Overall, community college enrollments in the State have grown and during the time period to be analyzed, 1975-6 to 1980-1; the number of community college students has increased by about 25 percent. The community colleges of New York State thus represent a vast student resource for the four year colleges and universities. This perspective is becoming increasingly apparent as many of the senior institutions develop "reciprocal" programs that will allow the easy movement of students from one type of college to another, with a minimum of effort and lost academic credits.

During the past five years, Schwendeman's Directory of College Geography has recorded a 30 percent decline in the number of students enrolled in Geography courses and a 40 percent decline in the number of Geography faculty in the State of New York. These figures parallel a national trend and as a result it is imperative for the discipline in this State to recognize the potential resource of the community college students. However, before any viable program to tap this resource can be started, it is essential that a data base be established to ascertain

the status of the discipline in New York State and what trends have developed in the recent past.

Community College Geography in New York State.

In 1976 a survey was undertaken for the Committee on Two Year Colleges of the Association of American Geographers to determine the nature and extent of Geography's role in the New York State community college system. Using the same survey instrument another investigation was undertaken during the spring of 1981. All of the community colleges in the State were contacted and after several repeat mailings a 100 percent return was obtained. Of the 38 colleges contacted only 17 and 19 reported that Geography courses were being taught on their campus during the 1975-6 and 1980-1 academic years respectively. Furthermore, on the 1981 survey three colleges stated that Geography had not been offered for some time at their institutions and that no plans had been made to revive the Geography curriculum there. The surveys thus concentrated on the colleges at which Geography was being taught.

From Table I it may be ascertained that during the 1980-1 academic year not all of the community colleges taught the same Geography courses as in no category did over 30 percent of the institutions teach any particular Geography course. At the present time Introduction to Cultural Geography is taught at by far the most institutions with Introduction to Physical Geography, World Regional Geography and Economic Geography all being ranked as the courses taught most frequently after Cultural Geography. Between the academic years 1975-6 and 1980-1 there had been

TABLE I

Frequency and Type of Geography Course Offerings: 1975-6 & 1980-1

Course Title	No. Colleges Offering This Course 1975-6	No. Colleges Offering This Course 1980-1	Total Number of Courses Taught Per Year 1975-6	Total Number of Courses Taught Per Year 1980-1	Course Enrollments 1980-1
Introduction to Geography	2	5	3	11	282
Introduction to Physical Geography	6	4	12	6	210
Introduction to Cultural Geography	5	8	7	15	435
World Regional Geography	4	4	8	12	340
Economic Geography	7	4	8	4	90
Political Geography	1	3	1	6	173
Geography of North America	4	2	7	4	115
Urban Geography	3	1	3	1	20
Geography of Western Europe	-	1	-	1	20
Conservation	-	1	-	1	50
Geography of Middle East	-	1	-	1	17
			49	62	1751

an increase in the number of colleges offering Geography courses and only in the case of Economic Geography, the Geography of North America and Urban Geography had the number of colleges teaching these courses declined. The largest decline was for Economic Geography (from 7 to 4 institutions) and this is surprising since during the past five years there has been a surge in Business/Economics offerings.

The total number of Geography courses taught has increased during the past half decade, from 49 to 62. This is encouraging but it is a trend that is difficult to assess. While the change in the number of courses taught clearly parallels the trend for the number of colleges offering these particular courses (for example, there was an increase in the number of colleges teaching Introduction to Geography and the actual number of Introduction to Geography courses taught) it is difficult to explain why World Regional Geography offerings would increase yet those for the Geography of North America would decrease. Unfortunately the survey results did not permit such fine scale analyses to be undertaken.

The enrollments in the Geography courses (available only for 1980-1) gave some overall measure of student demand. By far the most popular course in 1980-1 was Introduction to Cultural Geography (435 enrollments) followed by World Regional Geography (340 enrollments) after which only Introduction to Geography and Introduction to Physical Geography enrolled over 200 students each. The four basic introductory courses of the discipline were found to be those in greatest demand by

the students. This is hardly surprising since community colleges offer on the average two different types of Geography courses a year. If one accepts the hypothesis that the chances of many students taking more than one Geography course in a year are slim, it is possible to estimate what proportion of all community college students in New York State are enrolled in Geography courses. Recent figures for the 1980-1 academic year indicate that some 280,000 students may be enrolled in the community colleges of New York State (State Education Department estimate). Thus at best only 0.6 percent of all community college students are enrolled in Geography courses in any one year. This figure may be used as a guide to the relative status of the discipline in the community colleges of New York State -- a position of relatively very low standing.

One of the problems associated with the teaching of Geography in community colleges is the fact that trained geographers do not introduce the discipline to the students attending those institutions. In an attempt to ascertain the academic background of the geography instructors in the community colleges of New York State Table II was drawn up. Amongst the faculty teaching geography during the 1980-1 year, a total of 16 degrees in Geography were held (up from 11 in 1975-6) and although this may appear to be an encouraging trend it should be realized that far more degrees of Geography instructors were held in the discipline of History; some 28 in 1980-1, an increase from the 9 in 1975-6). The other disciplines in which the Geography instructors had

TABLE II

Academic Training of Faculty Teaching Geography, All Degrees Held:
1975-6 and 1980-1

Discipline	B.A.		M.A.		A.B.D.		Doctoral	
	1975-6	1980-1	1975-6	1980-1	1975-6	1980-1	1975-6	1980-1
Geography	3	5	6	8	1	1	1	2
History	5	10	3	11	1	1	-	6
Economics	3	2	4	1	1	-	1	-
Geology	3	2	1	1	-	-	-	-
Social Science	6	3	3	1	-	-	-	1
Education	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	2
Anthropology	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Sociology	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-
Physics	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-

their training were Social Studies followed jointly by Economics and Geology. It may be concluded, therefore, that although the mythical "football coach" is not teaching our discipline, individuals with degrees in the social sciences other than Geography are, and to a significant extent. These findings raise the serious question of why more Geographers are not teaching their discipline. It is probably because there is not sufficient demand in the community colleges for Geography to generate the need for full-time geography specialists to be hired or it may be that the graduate programs in the discipline are producing narrow specialists whose training does not lend itself to the range of the curriculum that the average community college social studies instructor must be able to offer to students. Another possible reason could be that of discipline identity, where the community college administrators do not have an comprehension of our discipline and delegate the teaching responsibility of it to nonGeography faculty as a means of helping them to fill out their teaching loads. Whatever the correct senario, the picture painted is rather bleak for the discipline and it is a situation that needs to be addressed forcefully and without delay.

Table III illustrates that the number of different faculty teaching Geography has increased in the last five years by some 18 percent to a total of 27. One encouraging note here is that the number of full-time faculty has increased while the number of part-timers has remained stable. Unfortunately, the increase in the number of faculty teaching Geography was well below the rate of growth for community college stu-

TABLE III

Work Status of Faculty Teaching Geography:
1975-6 and 1980-1

	1975-6	1980-1
Number of Full-time Faculty Teaching Geography	17	22
Number of Part-time Faculty Teaching Geography	5	5

dents during the same period. Furthermore the outlook for the discipline continues to look bleak as at only one institution were any new Geography course offerings planned and then this course, World Regional Geography, was only rated as being a "possibility" for future offering; all of this in contrast to the 1975-6 survey when 6 new geography courses were being planned to be offered.

It would seem from the foregoing section that the discipline of Geography requires significant infusions of assistance if it is going to grow in the community colleges of New York State in the future. Professional organizations will have to increase their inputs into the community college arena but unfortunately most respondents to the 1981 survey had no opinion as to how responsive the Association of American Geographers, the National Council for Geographic Education or the American Geographical Society had been in meeting the needs of community college Geography instructors (see Question #4 in the Questionnaire Appendix). In three instances for the AAG, one for the NCGE and none for the AGS did the respondents feel that these professional organizations had been responsive to their needs. These very low figures represent positive ratings of only 16 and 5 percent respectively for the AAG and the NCGE, a very poor showing that was a near mirror image of the 1976 questionnaire results and a situation that was paralleled by the fact that the special session for community college Geographers at the 1981 Annual Meeting of the AAG was cancelled because of lack of faculty/organization interest. It would seem that this lack of inter-

action between the community college Geography instructors and these professional organizations is a two way street but this factor was in accordance with the findings to the question on whether the community college organizations were more responsive to the community college Geographer than were the professional geography groups (see Question #5 on the Questionnaire in the Appendix), as only two respondents felt that community college organizations were more responsive, 6 felt that they were not and 10 had no opinion. This discovery was in sharp contrast to the 1976 results and illustrated that the community college Geographers do not feel that their needs are being met by the professional organizations. The void that exists, therefore, has to be filled if Geography is to thrive in this academic setting. An opportunity exists for the Geography groups to meet the needs of the community college Geographers and to help bolster the discipline at these institutions in New York State.

The need for more involvement in the community colleges of New York State by the professional Geography organizations is made more apparent by the fact that the Geography instructors perceived that more Geography courses could be taught (72 percent of the respondents held this view) and nearly 66 percent felt that more geography courses should be taught, views paralleling the 1976 survey (see questions #6 and #7, on the Questionnaire in the Appendix). There are potential gains that can be made in increasing the Geography component in community college curricula. Perhaps this is the time for increased cooperation with the

four year colleges and the universities since the 1981 survey indicated that two thirds of the respondents had poor or no interaction with these institutions, yet of the five respondents who had good or satisfactory interaction with the senior institutions they found them responsive to their needs (see Question #10 on the Questionnaire in the Appendix). This finding illustrated that there is great potential for improving interaction between the two and four year colleges/universities and that this can only benefit the discipline of Geography. In addition, studies have indicated that a large proportion of community college graduates continue their education at nearby four year schools and universities thus any time and extra effort involved in assisting the community college Geography staff could have its rewards in increased Geography enrollments at the senior institutions. Furthermore, if the professional Geography organizations were to become more responsive to the needs of Geography instructors in the community colleges, enrollments in the discipline as a whole could be augmented, a critical factor in the period of declining Geography enrollments.

Surprisingly, little opinion was forthcoming as to the role the regional divisions of the AAG could play as a vehicle for increasing two year-four year college interaction, an opinion unchanged from 1976 (see question #12 on the Questionnaire in the Appendix). Since many of the instructors of Geography were not trained as Geographers this was not surprising, however, when 66 percent of the 1981 respondents stated an interest in a New York State Geographical Society (down from 71 per-

cent in 1976) and none of them had negative opinions on the matter, the question of the effectiveness of the Middle States AAG organization in the academic arena of the community college has to be questioned. It may be that increased contact by the local four year colleges and universities, regional representatives of the NCGE and the regional divisions of the AAG could help community college Geography instructors, meet some of their professional needs and help to improve enrollments in Geography courses at the same time (question #11 on the Questionnaire in the Appendix).

The types of assistance stated as being desirable by the community college Geography instructors were related to their primary function -- teaching (see question #8 on the Questionnaire in the Appendix), although with the exception of field study guides all of the items on the 1981 list were closely ranked with and paralleled the findings of the 1976 survey. It is interesting that the desire for information about career openings for Geography students and the guide to undergraduate degree programs were rated so highly in the later survey. It would seem that Geography instructors would like to have information to pass on to their students about post-community college opportunities in Geography. This may be one area in which the regional divisions of the AAG and field representatives of the NCGE could become more active. The importance of the need for professional organizations to address the problems of the community college Geography instructors was brought out further by question #11 on the Questionnaire where the distinct preferences for

conference orientations were: (i) to discuss mutual problems/needs; and (ii) discussion/demonstration sessions on teaching techniques. Most of the respondents rated the presentations of scholarly research as the least desirable aspect or orientation of such a professional conference -- unfortunately the bulk of the professional Geography meetings are so oriented and thus perceived as having little value or relevance to those faculty teaching Geography in the community colleges.

Conclusion.

The comparative analysis of these surveys offers but a partial glimpse of a relatively small proportion of the community college Geography spectrum, however, it did identify many of the needs of the community college Geography instructors and how they viewed possible solutions to their problems. It is apparent that Geography in the community colleges of New York State holds a lowly status and one in which professionally trained Geographers do not play a dominant role. There have been some gains made in New York State over the past five years but these have been small. Clearly the needs of these faculty are not being addressed by four year college or university Geography departments, professional Geography organizations or the community college groups. With large numbers of students transferring from two to four year colleges and universities each year the discipline of Geography is clearly missing a vast resource pool of potential students and possibly future Geography majors and professionals. If the discipline is to survive it must place much more attention on the lower rungs of the professional

ladder and it must not forget that the largest Geography departments survive because they teach large numbers of students that have to be recruited each year. Furthermore, the finest Geography scholars were at one time inexperienced undergraduates whose interests were probably sparked by Geography instructors teaching introductory courses. The foundation of the discipline is in the undergraduate programs and the community college sector of that foundation is not being tapped to its fullest extent, if the New York State situation is an accurate model.

APPENDIX

THE QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN THE 1976 AND 1981 SURVEYS OF
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN NEW YORK STATE.

QUESTIONNAIRE

(1) On the table below please list all GEOGRAPHY courses offered at your institution, how often they are taught and the average enrollment in each:

COURSE TITLE	FREQUENCY OF OFFERING	AVERAGE CLASS SIZE PER ENROLLMENT
ex. Geog. of N.Y. State	once a year	35 students

SEE TABLE I

(2) Please list any NEW geography courses that are planned to be offered during the next two years.

(3) In which disciplines do the faculty teaching Geography hold degrees:

Faculty member (A) ____ full-time, ____ part-time. Bachelor's in _____
Master's in _____, Doctorate in _____

Faculty member (B) __ full-time, part-time. Bachelor's in _____
Maste _____

Faculty member (C) _ s in _____
Maste _____

SEE TABLES II & III

Faculty member (D) _ s in _____
Master's in _____, Doctorate in _____

Faculty member (E) ____ full-time, ____ part-time. Bachelor's in _____
Master's in _____, Doctorate in _____

NOTE: 1975-6 Survey Results: [2]
1980-1 Survey Results: 4

(4) Do you think that the following geographical organizations have been responsive to the needs of community college geographers?

Association of American Geographers [1] 3 yes, [4] 6 no, [10] 9 no opinion.
National Council for Geographic Education [1] 1 yes, [5] 6 no, [9] 11 no opinion.
American Geographical Society [2] 0 yes, [6] 7 no, [7] 11 no opinion.

(5) Do you believe that community college oriented organizations (ex. Community College Social Science Association) are better suited to meet the needs of community college geography faculty than the professional geography organizations (ex. Association of American Geographers)?

[7] 2 yes, [4] 6 no, [5] 10 no opinion

Comment _____

(6) Do you believe that more geography courses COULD be taught at your college?

[8] 13 yes, [4] 3 no, [4] 2 do not know

Comment _____

(7) Do you believe that more geography courses SHOULD be taught at your college?

[11] 12 yes, [3] 3 no, [0] 2 no opinion

Please explain your answer _____

(8) What types of aid would you like to have geography organizations or university geography departments give to those faculty teaching geography in community colleges?

[10] 12 Audio-visual materials (ex. maps, photo slides etc.)
[10] 11 Teaching Materials (ex. sample projects, data, references etc.)
[8] 5 Field study guides.
[5] 9 Career openings for geography students.
[9] 10 Up-to date syntheses of "what's going on" in the discipline (ex. new areas of research, research findings etc.)
[7] 9 A guide to geography in the four year colleges AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL.

Other _____

NOTE: 1975-6 Survey Results: [2]
1980-1 Survey Results: 4

(9) How much interaction (by letter, telephone etc.) does your geography faculty have with the geography departments in four year colleges and universities?

[1] 2 good interaction
[3] 3 satisfactory interaction
[4] 5 poor interaction
[7] 6 no interaction

Please comment on your answer to the above _____

(10) Are the four year college and university geography departments responsive to the needs of community college faculty teaching geography?

[2] 5 yes, [3] 4 no, [10] 9 no opinion

Comment _____

(11) Would you be interested in a New York State geography society in which community college and four year college faculties would cooperate as equal partners?

[10] 12 yes, [1] 0 no, [3] 6 no opinion

What should be the format of such meetings? (please rank your response #1 being highest preference, #4 being lowest preference)

[3.0] 2.9 Research paper sessions (as at regional meetings).
[1.4] 1.5 Demonstration/discussion sessions on teaching techniques etc.
[1.6] 1.5 Formal and informal meetings to discuss mutual needs, problems etc. (agenda to be distributed prior to meeting).
_____ Other, please describe: _____

(12) Are the regional meetings of the Association of American Geographer (in this case the Middle States Division) effective vehicles for two year-four year college interaction.

[2] 2 yes, [2] 1 no, [10] 13 no opinion

Comment _____